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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8569
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 2004
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1784
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 1207
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1570

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001069

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR
S/CRS
INL FOR KEVIN BROWN AND ANGELIC YOUNG
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS
STATE PASS DHS/TSA FOR ROBERT GREENE, ALLEN HURR, LUC PETIT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2018
TAGS: [ECON](#) [HA](#) [KCOR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: AIRPORT DIRECTOR GENERAL CENTER OF SECURITY DISPUTE

PORT AU PR 00001069 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Classified by CDA Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Port-au-Prince public prosecutor called in the Director General of the Toussaint L'Ouverture Airport in early July for questioning over the hiring of a private security company at the airport that allegedly used unregistered weapons. Although no charges were lodged, the episode has shaken Director General Lionel Isaac, who now fears for his personal security and no longer ventures outside his office to actively supervise airport security. The private security company appears to have been dismissed, and the Haitian National Police (HNP) was to have assumed responsibility for airport perimeter security on July 19. Embassy and American Airlines assess that this incident thus far has not degraded airport security. Although such high-handed intervention is typical modus operandi for the Port-au-Prince prosecutor Claudy Gassant, it is unclear what motivated him to move against the head of airport management. According to one Embassy contact, his intervention, in which he enlisted the help of the counternarcotics unit of the HNP, may reflect an underground struggle over control of drug enforcement at the airport. It remains to be seen whether the HNP can do a better job with airport perimeter security than the private security company. End Summary.

CHIEF PROSECUTOR THREATENS DIRECTOR GENERAL

¶2. (C) Poloff and Econoff met Former Fanmi Lavalas Deputy Franky Exeus on July 11. Exeus claims to be a close friend and consultant to Airport Director General Isaac, and claimed to have firsthand information on the events that occurred at the airport between Chief Prosecutor Gassant and DG Isaac. Exeus said that according to Isaac, three security agents from Magnum Security Company went to Gassant's office to complain that they had been fired and were owed back pay, and urged Gassant to open an investigation. (Note: Magnum is a private security company employed at the National Airport since 2004, with responsibility for security of the airport perimeter. End note.)

NO. I WON,T GO.

13. (C) Exeus recounted that Gassant arrived at the airport July 7 and demanded from Isaac to see a copy of Magnum,s contract. After questioning the company,s legitimacy, Gassant ordered the disarming all of the security agents, alleging their weapons were unregistered and hence 'illegal.' Gassant then sent a Justice of the Peace and three agents of the BLTS (the counter drug unit of the Haitian National Police) to the airport to retrieve the copy of the contract that Gassant had requested. Isaac questioned the propriety of drug agents, investigating an airport security contract. The Justice of the Peace then wrote out a warrant for Isaac,s arrest and ordered the BLTS agents to handcuff him. Isaac vehemently protested that such an order against a Presidential appointee was improper, and that he would not leave the airport with them.

14. (C) After Isaac made several phone calls, Minister of Public Works, Transportation and Communications Franz Verella showed up at Isaac,s office and supported his position that he could not be arrested while performing his duties under a Presidential appointment. Secretary of State for Security (in the Ministry of Justice) Luc Eucher Joseph then phoned and spoke with the Justice of the Peace, after which the Justice and the BLTS agents left Isaac,s office and waited outside to arrest him as he left. Several Parliamentarians arrived at the airport that night, and drove Isaac away in their car. Isaac did not report to work the following day. Meanwhile, the Director of Magnum Security Company was arrested for possession of 'illegal' arms (unregistered), and Gassant ordered Isaac not to leave the country.

15. (C) Isaac met at the airport on July 9 with Luc Eucher Joseph, Minister of Justice Magloire and Franz Verella who

PORT AU PR 00001069 002.2 OF 002

conveyed that President Preval was fully aware of the situation and determined that the HNP would henceforth take over security of the airport,s perimeter. Private security companies would no longer be utilized. On July 11, Isaac was summoned to the Prosecutor,s office for questioning. Gassant subsequently publicly accused Isaac of 'plotting to destabilize the country.' Exeus told poloff and econoff he remained at the Prosecutor,s office the entire day and night to support his friend. Issac was released at 11:00 p.m. that night, having been interrogated for approximately eleven hours. The charges against him were dropped, but Exeus said Isaac felt 'humiliated' and feared for his personal security. Additionally, he is disturbed that prior to these events, he had expressed distrust of the same three BLTS agents who came to arrest him, and had been 'watching them' for some time. (Note: As DG, Isaac worked closely with airport,s BLTS unit on security matters. End Note.) Isaac speculated that this was retribution. BLTS claims, however, that its low-ranking personnel were used in the operation and received a last minute call to respond to the airport with little explanation of what they would be doing when they arrived.

16. (C) American Airlines Country Director for Haiti Elsy Viala (protect) told poloff on July 15 that Isaac had confirmed to her by phone on July 13 that Prosecutor Gassant had ordered Magnum,s agents disarmed for possession of illegal weapons and had threatened him with arrest. She said that when Isaac returned to the airport to work after he was interrogated at the Prosecutor,s office, he was clearly shaken, told Viala he didn,t feel personally safe, and was at a loss as to why this had happened. Since his return from the interrogation, he remains in his office, and no longer personally inspects the airport grounds.

17. (C) Exeus believes the latest Gassant affair was an effort at character assassination against Isaac in order to facilitate his removal from managing airport security, since, Exeus believes, he is an effective official in the anti-drug trafficking campaign. (Note: this claim is debatable. End note.) Until this incident, he underscored, Gassant and

Isaac were friends. Exeus called Gassant a 'responsible man acting irresponsibly' who was manipulated into taking this action -- by whom, Exeus could not say -- in order to have Isaac removed from the airport and possibly fired. Whatever the intention, the Director General of the Port-au-Prince airport has been removed from airport perimeter security, responsibility for which now lies with the HNP.

18. (C) Comment: It is noteworthy that the BLTS Commander, Patrice Israel, and HNP Director General Mario Andresol were both out of the country at the time of this incident. Exeus opined that this confrontation was about gaining control of the security of the airport and possibly a struggle for control over drug enforcement and access to illicit proceeds of these operations. Embassy will engage contacts at the airport to develop information to assess how the HNP's performance on airport perimeter security compares with that of the private security firm. American Airlines representatives say they believe it is better to have the national police as the primary security entity at the airport rather than a private security company, but the effectiveness of the latter remains to be demonstrated.

TIGHE